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The Genius Of The Christian Church

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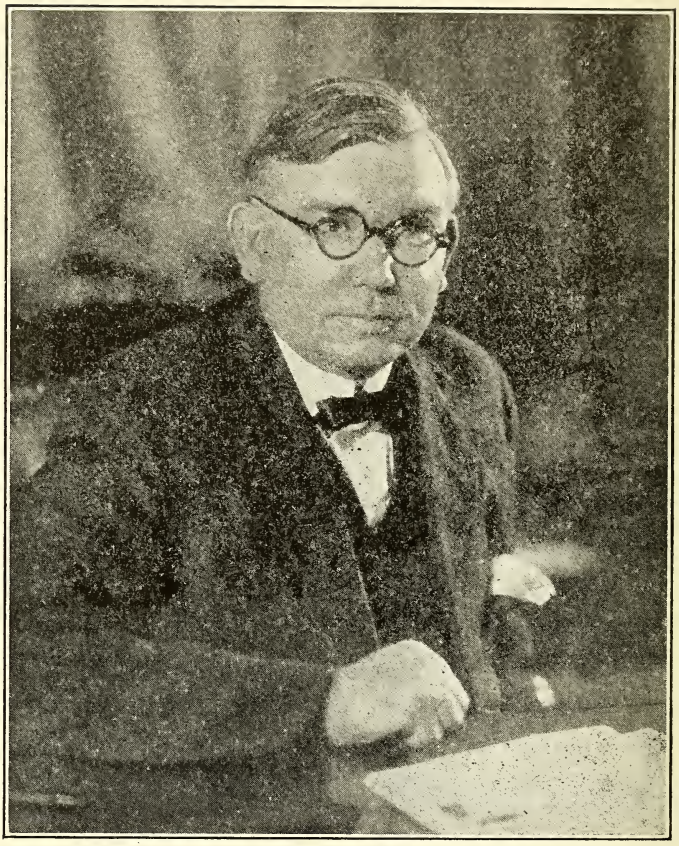
A Study In The Origin And History Of The Denomination Known As Christians

By

W. A. HARPER
President of Elon College

1929



PRESIDENT WILLIAM ALLEN HARPER

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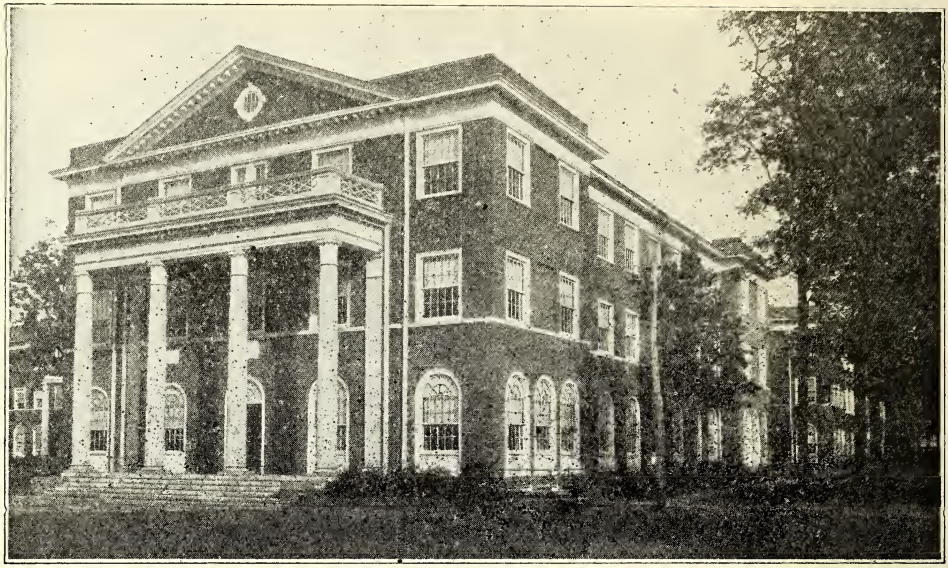
INTRODUCTION

No one can understand the origin and development of the Christian Church, as a denomination, who is unacquainted with the background of the movement that brought this communion into existence. It was never intended by its founders and their followers that the Christian Church should be another and a separate denomination added to the already too numerous churches and communions. The logic of events prior to the origin shows conclusively that the movement leading to the organization of the Christian Church was wholly inclusive and not exclusive in its polity and tenets. The spirit of democracy was inherent in and a part of the church, especially from the Reformation onward. The logic of the situation in the church and out of it from Luther's day drove inevitably to the conclusion that the thoroughly democratic mind must somehow express itself and find its way in ecclesiastical as well as in civil affairs.

Dr. Harper in the following pages has traced this history and the genius of this movement with unerring accuracy, and in doing so has made a distinct contribution to the history of the Christian Church and a movement that has meant so much to the church and to the world. This movement tended from the beginning to include in a common fellowship and a spiritual union those who accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as man's Savior and Redeemer and believed in Him as the Son of God. Such believers could do none other than take the Bible as their only creed and as a sufficient rule of faith and practice. The genius of the Christian Church was to admit to its fellowship all who would make the test of their membership Christian character, and would claim for themselves and allow to others the right of private judgment in the interpretation of Scripture. The history cited and the conclusions reached by Dr. Harper in the following pages, are incontrovertible and inevitable.

J. O. Atkinson.

Editor of the Christian Sun and Secretary of Missions of the Southern Christian Convention.



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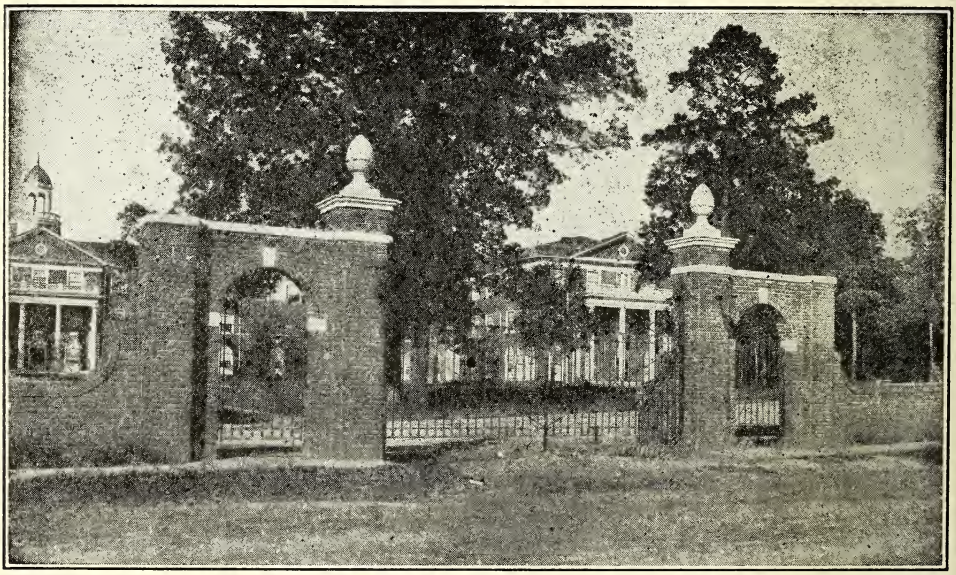

SOUTH ENTRANCE GATES TO ELON COLLEGE CAMPUS

THE GENIUS OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH

General Statement

The Christian Church arose contemporaneously with the organization of the Federal Government in America and is an exemplification in its origin of two important principles in the development of Christianity.

The first of these principles is that all the various varieties of groups or denominations that have appeared in Christian history are genetic developments from the original Christian Movement which came as a consequence of the life of Jesus at the dawn of our era. The Christian Church is like a branch of a tree of which this original movement is the stock.

The second principle is that whenever this Christian Movement is transported to a new milieu, while it breeds true to itself in the new situation, nevertheless new doctrines arise to meet the new occasions. These doctrines are analogies and social patterns raised by common usage and group authority into symbols of convictions. They are authoritative formulations by which the social mind of any age makes its religious experience intelligible (1).

Dean Shailer Mathews (2) has well described the necessity for as well as the origin of doctrines:

"A theological pattern of unchanging content has never existed. Theological terms imperfectly mirror experience. Their truth is not of the order of mathematics or science, but of law and life. As long as they are not so regarded, theological agreement is impossible. Each group reads its own experience into its formulas be they never so much alike in terms. From loyalty to the group using such terms, schisms, sects, and denominations are born." And he adds what is equally true, "When a pattern no longer expresses a religious value or service as the symbol of a group attitude, it should be and has been abandoned."

The Genetic Development of Christianity

Christianity began as a sect of Judaism. It was transported to Antioch of Syria. The Jews, of course, among whom this new movement had been cradled, were convinced that they ought to give to

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(1) Mathews, Shailer, THE GOSPEL AND THE MODERN MAN, Macmillan, 1910.

(2) Mathews, Shailer, THE FAITH OF MODERNISM, Macmillan, 1929. p. 72f.

the Gentile people at Antioch the body of doctrine which was particularly characteristic of Judaism (3). This theological system included four items: The law, the rite of circumcision, the institution of the Sabbath and the Messianic hope (4). But immediately that happened which always happens when a religious system is being introduced among peoples of another culture area. It could not be transported in terms of its origin and Paul, though a Pharisee, was keen enough to sense this. The new Christian group at Antioch accepted the heart of the Judaistic teaching, loyalty to Christ, and enthroned him in terms of the Messianic hope.

In passing it will not be out of place to remark that the missionary efforts of Christianity have been relatively ineffective, because the missionaries who have undertakn to evangelize the non-Christian peoples have assumed the attitude of importers of a ware that should entirely supplant the religion of the social groups to which they were exceedingly anxious to minister in spiritual things. They assumed that Christianity is a system of perfected theology, that it rests upon a stable body of unchanging truth, and that it is the business and the prerogative of those who have embraced this superior system to transport it as a finished product to those who have it not. To recur again to Dean Mathews' (5) telling phrase, the missionaries need to learn that there never has been and never will be such a thing in Christianity as "a theological pattern of unchanging content." It is gratifying to know that now the more progressive denominations have come to appreciate the necessity which faced Paul and the early Christians in Antioch of Syria, where loyalty to Christ as the Messiah became the rallying center of the Christian Movement, so much so that "the Disciples were first called Christians at Antioch." (6)

What took place in Antioch has taken place in every new situation in which Christianity as a genetic movement, able to adapt itself to new situations, has found itself. A few brief statements will illustrate what is meant. Throughout the Christian Movement there

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(3) Mathews, Shailer, A HISTORY OF NEW TESTAMENT TIMES IN PALESTINE, Macmillan, 1908.

Case, S. J., THE EVOLUTION OF EARLY CHRISTIANITY, The University of Chicago Press, 1914.

Smith, G. B., A GUIDE TO THE STUDY OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION, University of Chicago Press, 1916, pp. 19-81.

Case, S. J., THE SOCIAL ORIGINS OF CHRISTIANITY, University of Chicago Press, 1923.

(4) Mathews, Shailer, THE MESSIANIC HOPE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT, The University of Chicago Press, 1905.

Case, S. J., THE MILLENNIAL HOPE, The University of Chicago Press, 1918.

(5) THE FAITH OF MODERNISM, p. 73.

(6) Acts 11, 26.

have been a half dozen convictions which have been characteristic of the continuous, on-going group. It should be said in this connection that convictions underlie attitudes and that the doctrines which arise in any situation are analogies and social patterns made use of to express the attitudes that rest back upon these abiding convictions.

These basic convictions which underlie Christianity and which constitute the stock of the tree of which this movement is the developing, ongoing expression are (7):

1. Man needs God's help.

2. God is fatherly and is forgiving.

3. Jesus is the revelation in human experience of God effecting salvation.

4. Good-will is of the essence of God's nature and should characterize human life.

5. Immortality.

6. The Bible is the record of God's revelation and is useful for the development of the religious life.

It will be easy to show that everyone of these basal convictions has given rise to attitudes which have been expressed in satisfying doctrines in each new situation in which, as we review its development, Christianity has found itself since its beginning among the Jews. We do not have the time nor is it necessary that we should undertake to trace each of these convictions as it is doctrinally stated in these several situations. Nor is it necessary that we should consider each situation which Christianity has met and in which it has become the interpretation of the highest values inherent for living therein. We have already spoken of the situation at Antioch to which we may add the consequence of the impact of Christianity on the Greek World, on the Roman World, on the feudalistic world, on the nationalistic world, and on the democratic world. In each of these relations we shall consider only the basic conviction with reference to Jesus and the doctrines severally which it produced. In passing, however, it should be said that God has been conceived throughout under the pattern of a Sovereign, but this pattern has been interpreted according to the prevailing, ruling ideas in each particular age. For example, at the beginning this sovereignty was expressed paternalistically or patriarchally as being consonant with the Jewish conception of government. Sovereignty among the Greeks in the Graeco-Roman World could not be expressed politically because the

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(7) Mathews, Shailer, THE FAITH OF MODERNISM, p. 80f.

political authority centered in Rome. When Rome became the center of the Church this sovereignty was interpreted in terms of imperialism. This conception became particularly effective after the division of the Eastern and Western Churches in the Eleventh Century, at the point at which the Ecumenical Church became divided into the Roman Catholic and the Greek Orthodox Churches. We will find a similar interpretation of God as sovereign consonant with the prevailing ideas in each age. We shall find, as a consequence of our investigation and study of the reaction of these several groups in the expression of their loyalty to Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, that Christianity in every situation has reproduced itself genetically and that it may be described as essentially a tree and not a sand hill of disconnected and separate grains or atomistic groups.

a. The Greek World. (8)

As the membership of the Christian Movement became increasingly Hellenistic, it was necessary to interpret the Messianic hope respecting the saving work of Jesus in terms of the Greek philosophy. This became the vital issue of the Second Century. What was more natural than at first for the Greek Christians to identify Jesus as the Incarnation of the Logos or Word? This term expressed among the philosophers of Greece the active presence of God. By the Third Century this identification had been found to be unsatisfactory and the loyalty through which the Greek Christians expressed their confidence in the saving power of Jesus was expressed by the term "Son of God," which they considered the Biblical synonym of Messiah. What they were anxious to do was to express their conviction that the saving power of Jesus was due not to his humanity, but to the presence of God with him, and throughout the history of the Church interest has been concentrated upon Jesus as a Divine and saving personality.

The Greek mind also was in the habit of thinking in terms of substance and essence and so it found itself confronted with the question, "Are the superhuman elements that are found in Jesus really of the same substance as the Divine Father?" The settlement of this question found expression in the Nicene Creed, 325, and its later interpretation known as the Chalcedonian, which was adopted October 22, 451, (9). Out of this discussion came the doctrine of

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(8) Briggs, C. A., Theological Symbolics, Scribner's, 1914.

(9) Schaff, Philip, THE CREEDS OF CHRISTENDOM, Harper & Bros., 1877, Vol. 2, p. 62f.

The Chalcedonian Creed affirms the Nicene Creed, but was felt necessary because of the Christological heresies, known as Appolinarianism, Nestorianism, and Eutychianism, which had arisen in the century and a quarter since the Council of Nicea.

the Trinity (10) which undertakes to set forth metaphysical unity in the midst of religious experience as expressed in the Bible. "Whenever you meet God you meet him personally,"—this is the conviction that underlies the doctrine of the Trinity and of which that doctrine is the symbol. The pattern is of a father and the doctrine it undertook to legitimatize was that God begat his Son.

Throughout the Hellenistic period and the period of the Roman World until the division of the Ecumenical Church into the Eastern and Western Churches, Jesus was interpreted in terms of the Mass and became efficacious through the celebration of that sacrament in transforming human nature into the Divine, thus through sacramental power rationalizing the Resurrection of the Body, the Incarnation and the Trinity.

Inasmuch as the Eastern or Orthodox Church has not exercised any appreciable influence over the development of our Western civilization we will not trace the development of that Movement further.

B. The Roman World

It is entirely possible to regard the interpretation of Christianity which was characteristic of the Roman Catholic Church as of a piece with the Greek view. However, when Christianity had become the official religion of the Roman Empire, it was developed imperialistically in accordance with the Roman organization of political life and experience. This became particularly effective after the split in the Ecumenical Church in the Eleventh Century, though the sacrament of the Mass has continued throughout the Roman Catholic Church, so making it unnecessary for that Church to develop any dogma of the Atonement. There was lively discussion, of course, respecting the person of Jesus just as we have set forth for the Ecumenical Church above, but the Church as an organization became imperialistic and religion was interpreted in accordance with the decisions of the hierarchy. The Athanasian Creed and the Apostles' Creed, which had arisen in the Ecumenical Church and were carried over into the Roman Catholic Church, giving expression to the Christian convictions of the Church, legitimatize the same doctrines of the faith as we have found obtaining as a consequence of the impact of the Greek philosophical mind upon the foundational convictions underlying Christianity. The Apostles' Creed, for example, says nothing about the life of Jesus after the statement that he was born of the Virgin Mary until we come to the point where it is next stated

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(10) Paine, L.L., A CRITICAL HISTORY OF THE EVOLUTION OF TRINITARIANISM AND ITS OUTCOME IN THE NEW CHRISTOLOGY, Houghton Mifflin Co., 1900.

that he suffered under Pontius Pilate. The Greek and the Roman mind were concerned not with the teaching of Jesus, but with his Person. The Roman Church, however, added the idea of an authoritative churh with an authoritative head and these ideas came out of the imperial system of the Roman Empire. The pattern which they follow is of the God-head as sovereign in all life relationships and of man's worthlessness and his obligation to obey. As Dean Mathews (11) has so aptly described it, "The Roman Catholic Church became in form and genius a transcendentalized Roman Empire."

c. The Feudalistic World

During the Dark Ages the Roman Empire was broken up into feudalistic groups and we find that Jesus serves as an interpretation of the feudal relationship between the lord and his subjects. When a feudal lord has been offended by the conduct of his subject, an Atonement must be made or drastic penalty must be imposed. Jesus thereupon becomes the ransom to God for the sins of humanity, a pattern which is held today by a large group of adherents of the Christian faith, who cannot escape the conviction that God has been dishonored by man's sins and that this honor must be satisfied by a becoming Atonement.

d. The Nationalistic World (12).

In the Sixteenth Century, which is characterized politically by the Rise of the Nations, there developed a general dissatisfaction with the Catholic Church. Roman ecclesiasticism was repudiated, but here again almost the entire theological scheme of the repudiated church was perpetuated. An examination of the Augsburg Confession which is representative of the various pronouncements that came out of the conflict, shows that the doctrines of the Nicene, Chalcedonian, Athanasian, and Apostles' Creeds have been brought over into the Protestant Movement (13). It should be said in this connection that Luther and the other leaders of the Reformation had no thought of forming churches separate and distinct from the Catholic Church. What they had in mind to do was to correct the abuses that had arisen in the Catholic Church and particularly to relieve the nations of the economic burdens imposed upon them by Rome for

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(11) The Faith of Modernism, p. 69.

(12) Schaff, Philip, THE CREEDS OF CHRISTENDOM, Harper & Bros., 1877, Vol. III.

(13) Briggs, C. A., THEOLOGICAL SYMBOLICS, Scribner's, 1914.

the building of St. Peter's. The selling of indulgences together with the decisions of the Church Councils to put to death such men as John Huss, also made the occasion for examination into the whole matter. Luther was anxious to test the whole program of the church in accordance with the Scriptures, but had no thought of an ultimate break with Rome.

However, the northern peoples were strong individualists. They were accustomed to freedom and liberty and they had developed a rare genius for self-government. Each nation, therefore, issued its official declaration of its faith, not, however, in the form of creeds, but of confessions of faith. The innate love of the northern peoples for liberty however, because of the social inheritance of the imperialistic policies of Rome, did not eventuate in complete individualistic programs. They interpreted Christianity in accordance with the monarchical state, the form of political organization practiced by the nations. The malcontents in Germany revolted against Rome in 1529. The Augsburg Confession was published to the world in 1530. However, there was intermittent warfare until 1555 when by the Peace of Augsburg it was agreed that the religion of the Prince should be the religion of the people. This, of course, was never satisfactory. The interpretation of Christianity however continued to conform to the pattern of the monarchy.

Three churches, particularly, came out of the Reformation: The Lutheran Church based on constitutional government, the Reformed Church based on presbyterial government, and the Church of England based on the episcopal government. The Reformation was not successful in any part of the old Roman Empire, except in England, but it must be remembered in this connection that England was never Romanized. The law of England is not the CORPUS JURIS JUSTINIANI, but the common law. The old Roman World accustomed to the Roman law was too imperalized to embrace a movement like the Reformation.

The Pope was interested in the imperial expression of Christianity, but Luther and the Reformers, generally, were interested in its national expression. The Reformers, therefore, adopted for Christianity the pattern of a national monarchy. They conceived of God as a monarch and of his relation with man, as reproducing the conditions paralleling those which were found in the several states. Jesus in this new arrangement became the advocate of the people, presenting their pleas for consideration to the monarch. The Calvinists added the idea of the covenant with God in the Westminister Confession, in consequence of the growing spirit of democracy. This covenant in effect makes God a limited monarch.

e. The Democratic World

However, the love of liberty and freedom which we have said characterizes the northern peoples, could not be ultimately satisfied with the pattern of God as a monarch. The supreme example of this pattern is Calvinism, which teaches that God elects or rejects according to his own inscrutable will. The rights of man, however, over against not only the rights of kings, but of God had to be faced. The spirit of democracy was abroad and so self-determining religious groups like the Congregationalists, the Baptists, the Unitarians, and others arose not as state religions, but as voluntary associations of individuals with one another. Calvinism became modified theologically for not a few into the system of theology we today know as Arminianism.

The interpretation of Christianity in terms of individualism, freedom and liberty did not reach its zenith until the colonization of America (14). Belief in the existence of fundamental law and in the equally fundamental tenet, that life should properly be based upon contract (covenant as relates to God) resulted in two fundamental principles which characterized the devleopment of religion in the United States. These are:

1. As to the nature of the Church. The Church is a voluntary association of individuals.

2. As to the constitution of a church. A small number of individuals can voluntarily enter into contractual relations with one another and form a church.

This democratic view of the church is the pattern that has given rise to the denominations in the United States, though denominationism has never indigenously flourished in any other land than America, and attempts to transplant the American system to the lands that have had their church organized according to the imperialistic or monarchical patterns, have never been successful.

It is a mistake, however, to suppose that the early colonists came to America with the notion of making democracy the pattern of their political or religious relations with one another. We find no less a character than John Cotten (15) saying,—"Democracy I do not conceive that God would ever ordain as a fit government for either church or commonwealth." Likewise, Uriah Oaks (16) denounced religious freedom as "The first born of all abominations." Increase

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(14) McLaughlin, A. C., STEPS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF AMERICAN DEMOCRACY, Abingdon, 1920, p. 17f.

(15) Wertenbaker, T. J., THE FIRST AMERICANS, Macmillan, 1929, p. 93f.

(16) Wertenbaker, Op. cit. p. 91.

Mather followed in the same strain in a stern rebuke to "the hideous clamors for liberty of conscience." The Puritan community thought heretics should have liberty, but that liberty was confined to the liberty to leave.

The finest instance perhaps illustrating this intolerance of the early colonists is found in the life of Roger Williams. This talented minister came to Boston on the good ship Lyon in February 1631. He was driven from the Massachusetts Bay Colony within six years and was refused the right to settle in the Plymouth Colony, because, as Governor Bradford of that Colony said to him, it was not his desire to come into conflict with the governing authorities of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. He, therefore, settled in what is now Rhode Island. In this settlement the small group of independent thinkers decided upon a compact which they duly signed and in which they agreed to submit to a majority rule "only in civil things." (17).

Here we have the beginning, for the first time in history of the Christian Movement, of the separation of Church and State. We use this phrase, "the separation of Church and State," out of deference to custom. What really happened was a limitation of the authority of the state to civil affairs. The church has always assumed that it had the right to supply right ideals to the state, but has never agreed that the state could supply it any ideals or in any way interfere with its plans and programs. What Williams wanted was a free church in a civil state, a state limited to civil affairs.

In 1643 Roger Williams went to London and on March 14 of the next year secured a charter from a Commission of Parliament which completely embodied his ideas about liberty of conscience. This charter was amended in 1663 and remained the fundamental law of Rhode Island until the adoption of that State's constitution in 1842. This pact embodied in the charter of Rhode Island and later in the first amendment (18) to the constitution of the United States, made government civil only and was the first enunciation of this cornerstone of religious liberty in America. James Bryce says, that this is America's greatest contribution to the world.

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(17) Carpenter, E. J., ROGER WILLIAMS, The Grafton Press, 1909.
Channing, STUDENT HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES, p. 87.

(18) When the Federal constitution was adopted, seven of the Colonies had established churches; e. g, the Congregational Church in Connecticutt, the Episcopal Church in Virginia, etc. However, the first amendment provided that,—"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." This left the matter of state churches entirely in the hands of the several states, but eventually all the established churches in the colonies were disestablished. It should be clearly borne in mind that any particular state would under our constitution even now have the right to establish a state church, but the Congress of the United States would not have the authority to establish a national church.

The Doctrinal Expression of Christianity

In our discussion of the genetic development of the Christian Movement we have been brought face to face with doctrinal expressions of Christianity, which in each instance has aimed to express the basic Christian convictions in terms of the ruling ideas or patterns of each particular situation.

When Christianity began its transition from a merely Jewish sect to a Gentile Movement, constituted at first of both Jews and Gentiles and later becoming Gentile entirely, we found that loyalty to Jesus as Christ and Messiah became the central characterizing tenet of the new group. So pronounced were their devotion and loyalty to Christ that they named themselves Christians.

When the new Christian Movement came into the milieu of Greek philosophy, the pattern in which his Person was interpreted was paternalistic. God was his Father and out of this philosophical milieu, the doctrines of the Trinity and the incarnation developed.

Rome we have seen added to the interpretation given Christ by the Hellenistic philosophers, the idea of imperialism. The pattern changed from God as a father to that of an imperial soverign with Jesus as an advocate.

This same concept of Jesus as the revelation in human experience of God effecting salvation, is reinterpreted by the feudalists through a pattern expressing the relationship between the feudal lord and his subjects, by which, the honor of the lord being wounded, satisfaction must be provided through an Atonement. So Jesus became the ransom of the offending people. The pattern is still of God as sovereign, but the meaning of Jesus in the religious experience of the people, is changed in accordance with the ruling idea of feudalistic government.

At the Reformation period and the Rise of Nations, Christians still adhered to God as a sovereign, though not as an imperial sovereign. God is the monarch and Christ becomes the mediator of the people presenting their desires and aspirations to the soverign monarch.

The Democratic Movement which has had its fruit in America, has made bold to exalt the individual, to make him free and to entitle him to direct access to God, and even emboldened him to expect God to interpret his ways to men. God is still sovereign, but the individual suffragant is free to choose or reject him.

The Origin of the Christian Church.

We shall now see how the Christian Church summates the spirit and genius of the American interpretation of the Christian Movement.

a. In the South

The Christian Church originated out of the religious situation preceding, during, and immediately following the Revolutionary War. Fully to understand the conditions that produced the Christian Church, we must go back to the situation in England when John Wesley undertook the organization of his societies prior to the American Revolutionary War. Like Martin Luther, John Wesley had no thought of founding a separate church. Wesley was interested in reviving the spiritual life of the Church of England through the organization of societies in the membership of that body. In America, however, members of other churches as well as of the Church of England were eligible to membership in these societies. The ministers of Wesley's societies, both in England and in the New World, were originally lay-preachers. They rendered a powerful service of spiritual awakening by their stirring gospel messages. They were zealous prophets of the Lord and great spiritual outpouring accompanied their itineraries. The ordinances of the church, however, were conducted for them and their convrts by regularly ordained ministers of the established church. The Methodist Movement began in America ten years before the Revolutionary War when in 1766 two Methodist lay-preachers, Phillip Embury and Robert Strawbridge (19), landed in Philadelphia as the special representatives and missionaries of Mr. Wesley to the New World. Five years later Mr. Wesley dispatched Francis Asbury to look after his societies in America. The first Methodist preacher in the State of Virginia arrived in 1772 in the person of Rev. Robert Williams who delivered his first sermon on the steps of the old courthouse in Portsmouth, Virginia, the County seat of Norfolk County. Rev. Joseph Pilmoor on Sept. 28, 1772, at the Currituck Courthouse, delivered the first Methodist sermon ever preached in North Carolina.

Asbury reached Philadelphia October 27, 1771, and at a quarterly conference held in December, 1772, in Harford County, Maryland, a very serious question arose as to whether the lay-preachers of the Methodist Societies were competent to administer the sacraments to the people who had been converted under their ministry. The people were not satisfied to receive the ordinances at the hands of the clergy

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(19) MacClenny, W. E., THE LIFE OF JAMES O'KELLY, Edwards & Broughton Printing Co., Raleigh, N. C., 1910, p. 25f.

of the established church, because they were morally corrupt and had no sympathy with the spiritual zeal of the members of the Wesleyan Societies. When the Revolutionary War broke out in 1776 the majority of these Episcopal Clergymen, who had never become citizens of the colonies, returned to England and this precipitated a serious situation for the members of the societies in the colonies, particularly in Virginia and North Carolina.

Early in the history of the Wesleyan Movement in Virginia, James O'Kelly of Mecklenburg County of that State came under the influence of the Wesleyan lay-preachers (20). According to the records, O'Kelly was a deeply pious man and became greatly disturbed over his spiritual condition. With open Bible, it is said, he prayed earnestly for release and as he prayed a great peace came to his soul. The conviction thereupon dawned upon him that he must be a spokesman for Jesus Christ. Accordingly on January 2, 1775, he became a Methodist lay-preacher. He is described by Asbury himself as a pious and gifted minister and particularly as effective in prayer. James O'Kelly, like the other members of the Wesleyan Societies, was a spiritually minded man, who had had a personal experience of God and who highly valued the ordinances of the church. Like his fellow members in the Wesleyan Societies, he was anxious that the children of the members should be baptized by ministers and that marriage ceremonies, burial services, and the communion should be administered by ministers. Far more importance was attached to the sacraments of the church in those days than we at this present time attach to them.

We have seen that as early as 1772 because of the dissolute life and character of some of the ministers of the established church, there arose an agitation to qualify the Methodist lay-preachers for the performance of the ordinances of the church. So long, however, as regularly ordained ministers were available to perform these services, the matter did not come to an open demand. The Revolutionary War precipitated the matter and made this final step inevitable. It was a practical way of settling a critical situation and necessity forced these spiritually devout Christian men and women to take the step they did. Be it always said to their honor and credit, they did not act hastily. At the Leesburg Conference in 1778 the matter

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(20)) Asbury, Francis, THE JOURNAL OF THE REV. FRANCIS ASBURY, New York: N. Bangs and T. Wilson, 1821.

Paine, Robert, LIFE AND TIMES OF WILLIAM McKENDREE, Cokesbury, 1893.

Luccock, H. E., and Hutchinson, Paul, THE STORY OF METHODISM, The Methodist Book Concern, 1926.

Asbury, Herbert, A METHODIST SAINT, A. A. Knopf, 1927.

Duren, W. L., FRANCIS ASBURY, THE FOUNDER OF AMERICAN METHODISM AND UNOFFICIAL MINISTER OF STATE, Macmillan, 1928.

of qualifying the Methodist lay-preachers to administer the sacraments was a burning issue. They voted, however, to take an additional year to think the matter over and appointed the Fluvanna (Va.) Conference to be held at Old Brokenback Chapel near Palmyra in that county on May 17-18, 1779, as the time when this issue would finally be disposed of.

At this time Francis Asbury was in retirement in the home of Judge White in Delaware. Francis Asbury was a Tory in his sympathies and was so staunch a believer in the English Government, that he never became an American citizen. He was, therefore, opposed to the evident intention of the Methodist lay-preachers to undertake the performance of the ordinances. He was no doubt sincere in his attitude and consistent, not only because he believed in a monarchical form of political government and an Episcopal form of church government, but also because he saw such action on the part of the Methodist lay-preachers would be in opposition to Mr. Wesley's fundamental purpose in the organization of his societies and that such action must eventually lead to the organization of a new church. Mr. Asbury, therefore, assembled a private conference in April of 1779 at the home of Judge White. This conference was attended by eleven lay-preachers, among them William Watters, said to be the first native lay-preacher of Methodism in America. At this conference Mr. Asbury caused action to be taken against the impending decision of the Methodist lay-preachers soon to meet in Fluvanna County to decide the issue as to the celebration of the ordinances, and he dispatched William Watters to convey to the conference that assembled at Old Brokenback Chapel on May 17, 1779, the opposition of this group to the action which he was sure would be taken at Fluvanna.

Nevertheless, the Fluvanna Conference voted to qualify the Methodist lay-preachers to perform the ordinances of the church, appointed a Presbytery, consisting of Philip Gatch, James Foster, LeRoy Cole, and Reuben Ellis, first to administer the ordinances to themselves, second to authorize any other preacher or preachers approved by them, by the laying on of hands to administer the ordinances. They gave as their reason for this action, "Because the Episcopal Establishment is now dissolved, and therefore, in almost all the circuits the members are without the ordinances, we believe it to be our duty." Eighteen Methodist lay-preachers were duly ordained at this time. The immortal list reads as follows: Isham Tatum, Charles Hopkins, Nelson Reed, Reuben Ellis, Philip Gatch, Thomas Morris, James Morris, James Foster, John Major, Andrew Yeargin, Henry Wills, Francis Poythress, John Sagman, LeRoy Cole, Carter Cole,

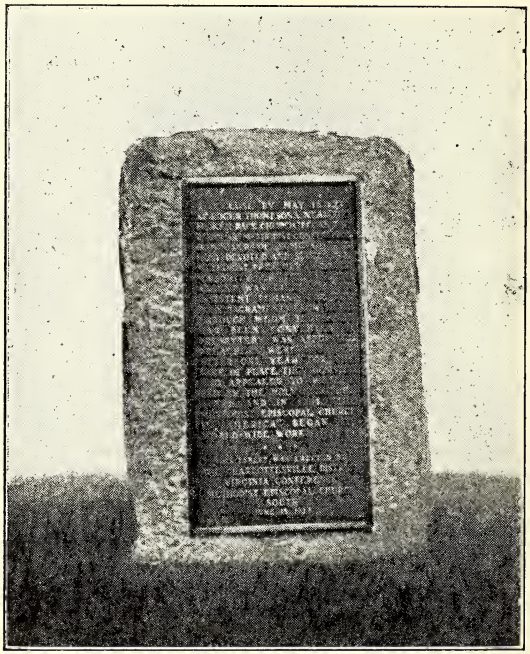
(Continued on page 21)

VIEW OF MARKER ON SITE

OF THE

OLD BROKEN-BACK CHURCH

LOOKING SOUTH



The inscription was written by Bishop Collins Denny.

PROGRAM OF EXERCISES, JUNE 15, 1927

10:00 O'CLOCK, A. M.

AT THE

UNVEILING OF A MARKER

IN MEMORY OF THE

HISTORIC METHODIST CONFERENCE

HELD IN

BROKEN-BACK CHURCH IN FLUVANNA COUNTY, VA.

MAY, 17-18, 1779

Rev. M. S. Colonna, D. D., P. E., Presiding

Address ..... Bishop Collins Denny, LL. D.,

Bishop Collins Denny in Chair

Address ..... President W. A. Harper, LL.D.,
of the Christian Church

Address ..... Rev. Thomas H. Lewis, LL. D.,
of the Methodist Protestant Church

Address ..... Rev. Henry C. Pfeiffer, LL. D.,
of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South

Address ..... Bishop Luther B. Wilson, LL. D.,
of the Methodist Episcopal Church

Unveiling of Marker ..... Bishop Denny

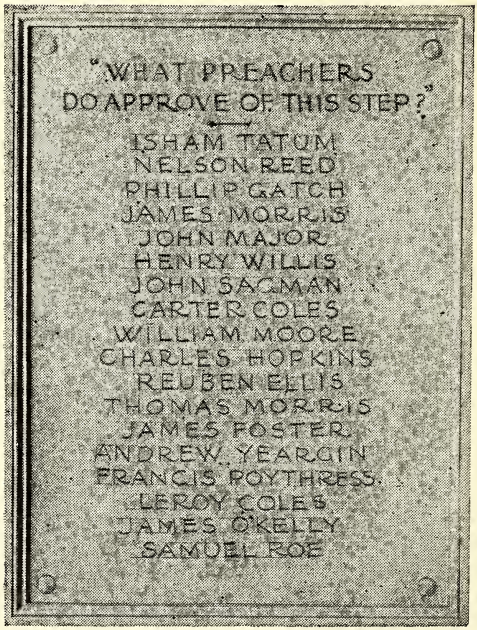
Benediction ..... Bishop Wilson

3:00 O'CLOCK, P. M.

Sermon ..... Rev. Thomas H. Lewis

Benediction ..... Rev. Lloyd C. Wright, Pastor

VIEW OF THE MARKER ON SITE
OF THE
OLD BROKEN-BACK CHURCH
LOOKING NORTH



List of the eighteen Wesleyan Lay-Preachers who on May 18, 1779, voted to ordain themselves, and who by that historic vote brought the Methodist Episcopal Church of America into being as a separate religious organization.

James O'Kelly, William Moore, Samuel Roe. This was the real beginning of the Methodist Church in America, and but for the injection later into the movement of the monarchical ideas of Francis Asbury there would never have been a Christian Church on this continent, nor a Methodist Protestant Church.

The action of the Fluvanna Conference, as we have already indicated, did not meet the approval of Francis Asbury. He regarded the eighteen preachers who took favorable action and were duly ordained at the Fluvanna Conference as rebels against the Wesleyan Societies, much as the American patriots were rebels against the British Government. He, therefore, caused to meet in Baltimore at the Lovely Lane Chapel on April 24, 1780, another conference to consider what should be done. At this conference, according to the records, the following questions were asked: "Does this whole conference disapprove what steps our brethren have taken in Virginia? Answer: Yes. Do we look upon them no longer as Methodists in connection with Mr. Wesley and us until they come back? Answer: Agreed. What must be the condition of our union with our Virginia brethren? Answer: To suspend all their administrations for one year, and all meet together in Baltimore."

It is needless to say that the Rev. James O'Kelly and the Virginia brethren did not attend this conference. Their conference met that year on the 28th of May at Manakintown on the historic James River, some fifteen miles from Richmond. They were acquainted with what had been done at the Baltimore Conference of that same year and considerable time was spent in discussing the matter of an agreement with the brethren led by Mr. Asbury. Finally in the interest of peace and harmony, and not because their judgment or conscience approved, they agreed to a working truce with Mr. Asbury and for the suspension of their administration of the ordinances for a year. The Rev. James O'Kelly refused to accept the conditions of this agreement, and he likewise consistently refused to sign Mr. Asbury's agreement submitted at the 1782 Virginia Conference, held April 17 of that year in Sussex County.

This question of the competency of Methodist lay-preachers to perform the ordinances was not finally disposed of until the Christmas Conference in 1784 in Baltimore. The Revolutionary War was over, the American colonists were free, and the disestablishment of the Church of England was inevitable throughout the land. Mr. Wesley, therefore, though reluctantly, wrote his historic letter from Bristol, England, dated September 10, 1784, in which he gave his full consent for the ordination of the traveling preachers of his societies in America. In this letter he appointed Dr. Coke and Francis As-

bury as joint superintendents. It was the Christmas Conference that injected into the Methodist Movement in America the idea of the Episcopacy, which led to the organization of the Christian Church and in 1830 to the organization of the Methodist Protestant Church.

Two ideas were prominent in the Christmas Conference: the one the Episcopal idea championed by Francis Asbury, and the other the democratic idea championed by James O'Kelly. The influence of Asbury was such that he was successful in having the church that took its official origin at that time to assume the title "The Methodist Episcopal Church," arguing that the word "Methodist" nullified the effect of the word "Episcopal," so that the people really would rule and not the ecclesiastical hierarchy with which they were acquainted as part and parcel of the Established Church out of which they had come. James O'Kelly said that he would agree to this with that understanding. He hoped to be able as time went on, to safeguard the spiritual liberties of the people. He was unwilling to be the leader of a party so long as there was hope of preserving religious liberty and a clear conscience, in the organization he loved.

At this Christmas Conference Mr. Asbury was ordained one day a Deacon, the next an Elder, and the third a Superintendent by Dr. Coke, assisted by Revs. Richard Whatcoat, Thomas Vasey, and Philip Otterbein, the last named being a minister of the German Church. On Sunday, January 2, 1785, ten years after he had first become a Methodist lay-preacher the Rev. James O'Kelly and twelve others of the most successful lay-preachers of the Wesleyan Societies were ordained by this same Presbytery assisted by Mr. Asbury. This noble thirteen thereupon ceased to be members of the Church of England and became elders in the Methodist Episcopal Church of America.

The question which had been brought forward as a burning issue at Leesburg, settled at Fluvanna, reopened at Lovely Lane Chapel in Baltimore, and settled by truce at Manakintown and again in Sussex County, Virginia, was now fully disposed of. The lay-preachers of the Wesleyan Movement were henceforth competent to perform all the ordinances, and a new church had arisen on American soil, a church filled with religious zeal, spiritual fervor, and evangelistic spirit. It is a pity that the Episcopalizing of this genuinely democratic spiritual brotherhood made impossible the peaceful continuation of the good work thus undertaken.

This Episcopalizing of the Methodist Church in America brought prominently to the front two serious issues that had to be disposed of and, sad to say, both of them were disposed of by splits in the parent organization. The first of these related to the rights of the

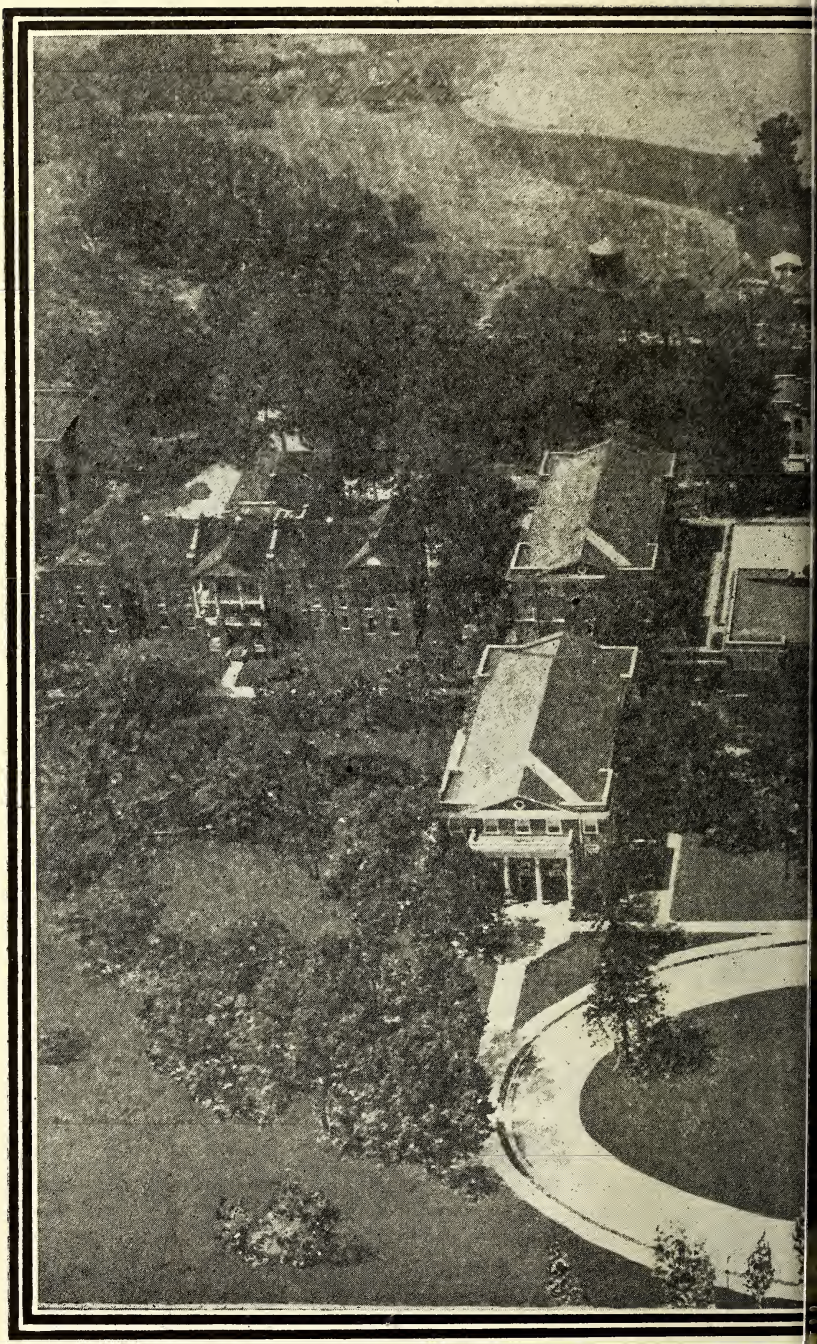
ministers in relationship to the Episcopate and the second, to the representation of the laity in the Councils of the church.

Almost immediately following the Christmas Conference in 1784 Francis Asbury undertook the organization of what he called "The Council," consisting of himself and his superintendents or presiding elders. This body was to have the right to adopt a consitution for the new church and to make rules and regulations for its government. James O'Kelly stoutly opposed this plan. He won the preliminary skirmish by having it agreed that the acts of "The Council" should not be binding upon a district until a majority of the preachers therein had voted for it. Mr. Asbury then began presenting the new constitution and government to the districts. Some of them refused altogether to approve and others to approve with special modifications. This produced an intolerable situation and led to the calling of a "General Conference" in Baltimore in 1792. This had been James O'Kelly's idea from the beginning and he is honored to have given to the Methodist Episcopal Church the idea of the General Conference which has been a most helpful auxiliary in their denominational life and progress.

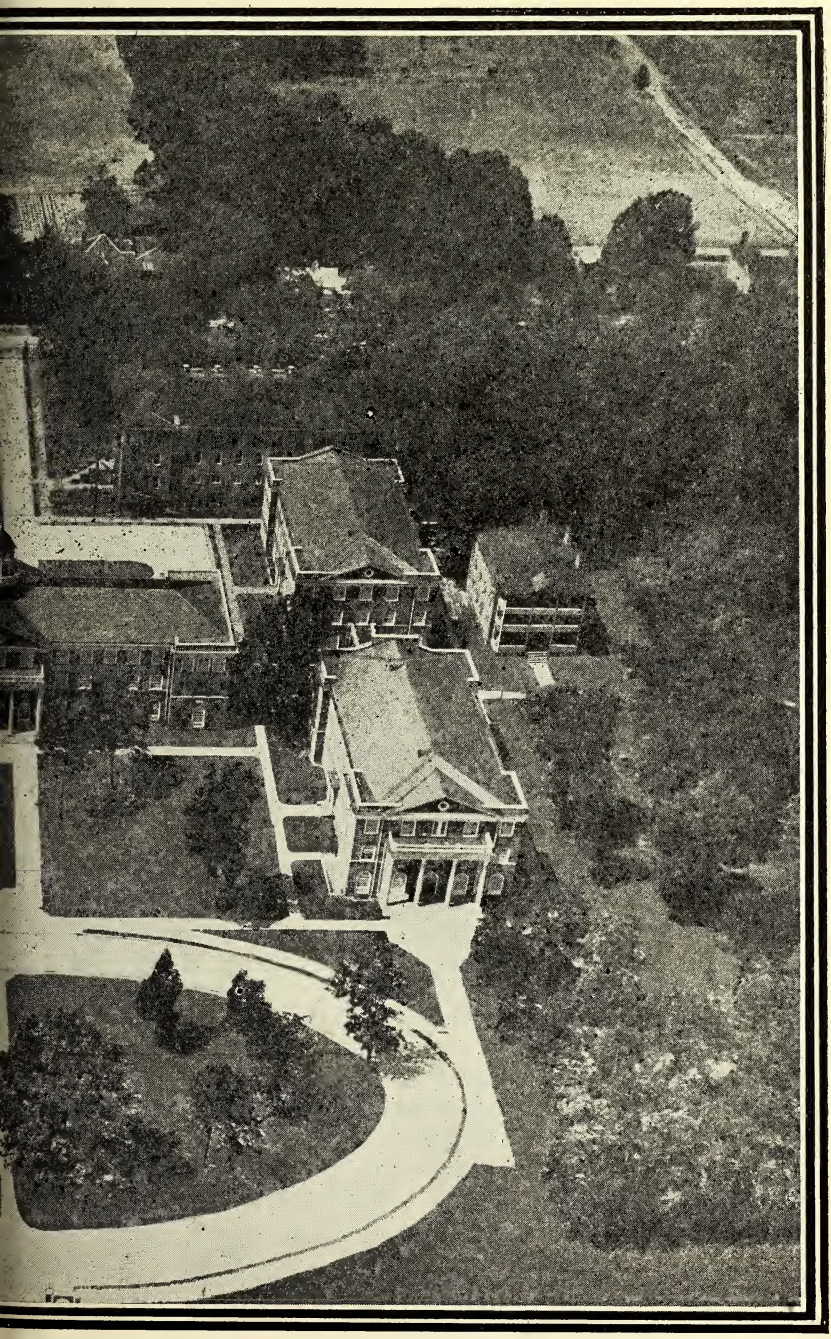
It was at this General Conference in 1792 that the Rev. James O'Kelly proposed his historic "right of appeal." The Methodist Church in England had just prior to the assembling of the Baltimore Conference incorporated this very principle into its methods of administration. Mr. O'Kelly, however, did not know of this, though Dr. Coke and Mr. Asbury were both aware of it. They did not, however, allow the matter to be brought to the knowledge of the Baltimore General Conference. Mr. O'Kelly contended that a minister, when the Bishop had read the list of his appointments, if he felt that he had been injured, should have the right of appeal to the conference in session and, if the conference approved, he should be given a new appointment. After three days debate and by political and parliamentary maneuvering this eminently just motion was defeated, the vote being taken when about 75 of the preachers present were absent at a revival meeting with only about 100 present. When James sent at a revival had failed, he and thirty other preachers withdrew and after a conference with Dr. Coke, finding that there was no hope of a reconsideration, returned to their homes in Virginia and North Carolina.

In 1793 this group of preachers met at Reese's Chapel in Charlotte County. Virginia, and decided to organize themselves into "The Republican Methodist Church," but here again, desiring not to do anything hastily, they agreed to consider nothing as settled until they should have another year to consider and appointed a meeting at Lebanon Church, Surry County, Virginia, for August 4, 1794.

(Continued on page 26)



AIRPLANE VIEW OF EL



BUILDINGS AND CAMPUS

The Conference appointed for 1794 continued in session for two days. On the second day of the gathering, August 5, 1794, action was taken that brought into existence the first democratically governed church that arose indigenously on American soil. When the members of the new group had completed their work, they had given the laymen equal representation with the ministry and left the decision of matters of government and policy to the conference itself, composed of both ministers and laymen. They had also selected as the basis of their organization truly democratic principles and had done this with the specific purpose in mind of bringing together all the divided flocks of Christ.

The principles which they enunciated as their consitution were these:

"The Lord Jesus Christ, the only Head of the Church.

"The name Christian, to the exclusion of all party and sectarian names.

"The Holy Bible, or the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament, the only creed, a sufficient rule of faith and practice.

"Christian character, or vital piety, the only test of church fellowship or membership.

"The right of private judgment, or the liberty of conscience, the privilege and duty of all.

"The union of all the followers of Christ, to the end that the world may believe."

There thus arose on American soil a free church in a free country, governed by free believers, a church that rightly claims to be the first truly indigenous spiritually democratic church on the American continent. This church has always lived in fraternal relationship with other churches and has never been rent and torn by doctrinal disputes or heretical trials. It has for 135 years lived as a spiritual democracy, a religious brotherhood, a Christian fellowship, and has continuously practiced Christian union.

The purpose of the Christian Church was not to found a new denomination, but to promote the union of Christ's followers. Surely no greater purpose or more foundational as touching the success of the Kingdom of Jesus Christ in the earth they thought could be enunicated than this zealous enterprise which animated their hearts and stirred them to a crusade of reconciliation, fellowship, brotherhood and Christian union. They did not invent this purpose. They found it central in the program of Jesus for His Kingdom. They read that, just before His arrest and crucifixion, our Lord prayed earnestly for the oneness of His followers and that He prophetically assigned as reason for His prayer, that the world might believe that

His Father had sent Him into the earth. Anything that Jesus prayed for these spiritual democrats were convinced they should earnestly work for. They had accepted the Bible as their only creed and as their all-sufficient rule of faith and practice, and they aspired to prove the sincerity of their devotion by the earnestness of their zeal for this great enterprise. Their followers have through the century and more of their history been the prophets and protagonists of this new day for the church and because they were sincere in their aspirations for Christian union, it has been easy for the members of this church to unite themselves with other churches and they have done so to the depletion of their own membership, but be it truly said that these members of the broad fellowship of the Christian Church who have gone into other denominations have been as a yeast, a spiritual yeast, in the meal that has fermented and brought the whole American church to the point where today there is open and frank and hopeful discussion of the desire for and interest in Christian Union. The time has even come when two world conferences have been held to discuss this same vital issue, one in 1925 on "Life and Work," and another two years later on "Faith and Order." The Christian Church has not failed, therefore, in its proclamation of Christian Union.

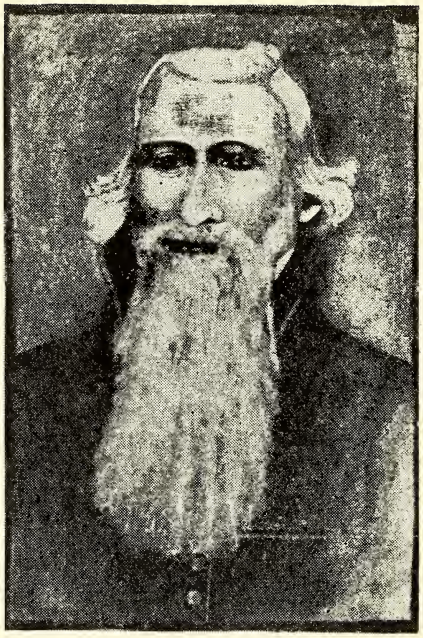
In theological belief the Christians of the South have never differed from the Methodist Societies, but in the matter of church government they have seriously differed, believing in the democratic control of things religious just as they believed in the democratic control of things political.

MacClenny (21) in his account of the Christian Church in the South says: "The whole cause (of the origin of the Christian Church) from the beginning had been purely governmental and not doctrinal as some would try to show."

The last phrase in the quotation just made, "as some would try to show," has locked up in it an unseemly amount of bitterness and rancor. The Methodist leaders from the day of James O'Kelly's withdrawal from the Baltimore Conference have insisted that he had ulterior motives in leading the schism, and further that he was a heretic, in particular a Unitarian. In the days following the Civil War, when the Christian Church in the South was endeavoring to recover from the staggering blow which it had received during that struggle, the Methodist leaders were particularly loud and insistent in denouncing the Christians as Unitarians. There was no way to disprove this charge except for the ministers individually and the other leaders, when they heard the charge, to repudiate it. Under the leadership of Dr. W. B. Wellons, one of the then powerful leaders

(21) Op. cit. p. 118.

(Continued on page 31)



The Reverend James O'Kelly
"The Southern Champion of Christian Freedom"

PROGRAM OF EXERCISES, JULY 7, 1927

10:00 O'CLOCK, A. M.

AT THE

UNVEILING OF A MARKER ON THE SITE,

IN MEMORY OF THE

ORGANIZATION OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH

HELD IN

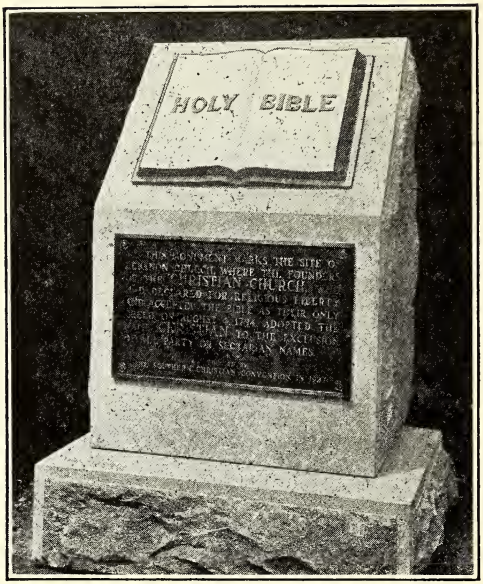
OLD LEBANON CHURCH, SURRY COUNTY, VIRGINIA

AUGUST 4-5, 1794

Hon. Jesse F. West, Judge of the Supreme Court of Virginia, of Waverly, Presiding

J. M. Darden, Suffolk, Va., Chairman Program Committee

1. Music by Band
2. Doxology
3. Invocation by Rev. E. B. White, of Dendron, Va.
4. Hymn: "The Church's One Foundation" No. 506 Christian Hymnary
5. Prayer by Dr. W. W. Staley, of Suffolk, Va.
6. Hymn: "I Love Thy Kingdom Lord" No. 499 Christian Hymnary
7. Address by Hon. A. W. McLean, Governor of North Carolina
8. Music by Band
9. Address by Col. E. E. Holland, of Suffolk, Va.
10. Waverly Quartette: J. F. West, Jr., O. H. West, Joe Moss and J. F. Beard
11. Address by Dr. W. A. Harper, President of Elon College
12. Presentation of Monument by Dr. J. O. Atkinson, of Elon College, N. C.
13. Unveiling of Monument by Miss Antoinette Darden
14. Acceptance of Monument by Col. J. E. West, Lieut-Governor of Virginia
15. Hymn: "Blest Be The Tie That Binds" No. 558 Christian Hymnary
16. Address by Dr. C. H. Rowland, of Greensboro, N. C.
17. Benediction by Rev. Stanley C. Harrell, of Durham, N. C.
18. Music by Band



Marker on the Site of the Old Lebanon Church
IN Surry County, Virginia
Commemorating the
Founding of the Christian Church There
on
August 4-5, 1794

of the Christian Movement in the South, it was decided to issue a booklet entitled "The Principles and Government of the Christian Church, with all Official Forms and Ceremonies." Accordingly in 1867 this booklet was issued and a statement was made in regard to certain doctrinal matters commonly held by members of the Christian Church. In this doctrinal section there was a statement as to God, as to the Son, as to the Holy Spirit, as to the Holy Scripture, as to human depravity, as to repentance and faith, as to baptism, as to the Lord's Supper, as to the Resurrection, as to the punishment of the wicked, and as to rewards of the righteous. These doctrinal statements are throughout Arminian and as to sacramental matters Methodistic. The publishing of this book served the purpose of silencing the critics of the church in the South. However, the Christian Church always felt compromised that this statement had been made and accordingly in 1922 a new edition of the "Principles and Government" was issued from which all doctrinal matters were omitted. By that time the Church had fully established itself in the minds of the public and the criticisms of its enemies could not injure it.

It should be said, however, in justification of the attacks of the Methodist leaders upon the church in the South following the Civil War, that the Christian Church had from the beginning numbered in its ranks certain leading thinkers who were Unitarians. This was a legitimate consequence of the right of the individual interpretation of the Scriptures which was declared to be at the very beginning of the denomination, the right and duty of all. To this day there are numbered in the ranks of the leaders of the Christian Church men and women of various conceptions and interpretations of the Christian faith, both Trinitarian and Unitarian. There has even arisen in the Christian Church a group of leaders who may be called "Duarians,"—men, e. g., like Nicholas Summerbell and his distinguished son, Joseph J. Summerbell, who accepted the deity of Jesus, but who denied the personality of the Holy Spirit. And yet in the ranks of the Christians themselves there has never arisen a heresy trial. In its fellowship today fundamentalists and modernists of the extremest types live and worship side by side in peace and harmony.

b. In New England

Near the close of the Eighteenth Century, Dr. Abner Jones of Hartland, Vermont (22), a member of the Baptist Church, became

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(22) Morrill, M. T., A HISTORY OF THE CHRISTIAN DENOMINATION IN AMERICA, The Christian Publishing Asso'n, Dayton, O., 1912, pp. 15-101.

Burnett, J. F., THE ORIGIN AND PRINCIPLES OF THE CHRISTIANS, The Christian Publishing Asso'n., Dayton, Ohio, 1921.

Jones, Abner, MEMOIRS, Norris & Sanger, Exeter, N. H., 1807.

Jones, A. D., MEMOIR OF ELDER ABNER JONES, William Crosby & Co., Boston, Mass., 1842.

greatly disturbed over sectarian names and human creeds. Jones eventually became a minister and preached his first sermon in 1801. At Lyndon, New Hampshire, in the fall of 1801 he organized the first free Christian Church in New England. The members called themselves simply Christians, being not even willing to use the definite article "the." In 1802 he organized a church at Hanover, the seat of Dartmouth College, and another at Piedmont. In November of that year three Free Will Baptist preachers ordained him to the ministry with the distinct understanding that he would not be a Free Will Baptist, but only a Christian.

He soon became associated with Elias Smith who had also withdrawn from the Baptist Church and was preaching in Portsmouth, New Hampshire. Elias Smith was the son of Stevens Smith, a Baptist. His mother, Irene Ransom, was a Congregationalist. The Baptists adhered to Calvinism in doctrine, but Elias Smith considered Calvinism milder than Puritan Congregationalism. When Abner Jones met Elias Smith (23) in 1803, the latter embraced the views of Dr. Jones and the church that was under his care adopted the same principles.

At this point the Christian Church in New England may be said to have originated because churches began to be established all through the New England States as a consequence of the labors of these two great leaders. Elias Smith was a most talented man and conceived the idea of a religious newspaper. He founded the "Herald of Gospel Liberty," the official national organ of the Christian Church, in Portsmouth, N. H., publishing the first issue on September 1st, 1808. This was the first religious newspaper ever to have been published and has continued to be continously published, though sometimes under a different name, from the day of its founding until now.

c. In the West.

The Christian Church in the West began with a great revival of religion among the Presbyterians of Tennessee and Kentucky, which embraced the years 1799-1801. At the close of this great revival the Rev. Barton W. Stone (24), a learned and eloquent minister, with

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(23) Barrett, J. P., THE CENTENNIAL OF RELIGIOUS JOURNALISM, The Christian Publishing Asso'n., Dayton, Ohio 1908.

Smith, Elias, THE LIFE, CONVERSION, PREACHING, TRAVELS AND SUFFEERINGS OF ELIAS SMITH, Beck & Foster, Portsmouth, N. H., 1816.

(24) Summerbell, N., HISTORY OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH FROM ITS ESTABLISHMENT BY CHRIST TO A. D. 1790, The Christian Pulpit, 1873.

Morrill, Op. cit. p. 45f.

Burnett, Op. cit. p. 29f.

Rogers, John, THE BIOGRAPHY OF ELDER BARTON W. STONE, written by himself and edited by Elder John Rogers, J. A. & U. P. James, Cincinnati, Ohio, 1847.

Richard McNemar, John Thompson, John Dunlevey, and Robert Marshall withdrew from the synod of Kentucky and organized what they called the "Springfield Presbytery." This action was taken because many of the ministers of the Presbyterian Church in Kentucky advised their congregations to remain away from the revival meetings and endeavored to explain to them that these revivals were in the nature of the wildest fantasy of an overheated imagination, and further because the Presbyterian opponents of the revival brought charges of heresy against McNemar.

On June 28, 1804, however, the "Springfield Presbytery" was formally dissolved and it was voted that each church should be entirely independent, that each member was privileged to teach and believe those things which from his careful and candid study of the Scriptures he might conceive to be true, and that church and people alike should be known only as Christians. This action was taken as a consequence of the visit of the Rev. Rice Haggard to the "Springfield Presbytery," Haggard having been associated with James O'Kelly in Virginia.

d. Comments by Way of Summary

It will thus been seen that the Christian Church had three separate origins. That in the South was governmental and not doctrinal, that in New England was doctrinal, and that in the West was likewise doctrinal, being a revolt against the Calvinistic tendencies and beliefs of thhe Presbyterian Church, precipitated by a heresy charge.

The preaching of the early ministers of the Christian Church was intensely evangelistic. Their passion for the union of Christ's followers in which they devoutly believed, made it seem unnecessary for them to organize the converts to their preaching as they went from place to place. Ministers in New England journeyed all the way along the Atlantic Seaboard and to the far South and then to the West, and likewise ministers from these sections visited the other sections of the country in their continual evangelistic tours. The Herald of Gospel Liberty, founded as we have said by Elias Smith in 1808, is filled with reports and letters written by these itinerant ministers setting forth in glowing terms the glorious achievements of their spiritual victories. They met with each other informally and as often as possible. Their converts, however, swelled the ranks of other denominations, who did not believe in Christian Union.

The first delegated Conference of the Christians, composed of Elders and laymen, was held in New Bedford, Mass., in 1817. The first United States Christian Conference was held at Windham,

Conn., in 1820. In 1822 the third annual meeting of this general conference was held at Greenville, New York, attended by 4,000 people, the meetings being held in a grove.

The church split in 1854 over the question of slavery, in the General Convention held in the city of Cincinnati, Ohio. At this Convention a majority report was submitted declaring that slavery was an infringement on human rights. The Southern delegates presented a minority report alleging individual liberty and the right of private judgment as foundational in the organization of the church and insisting that the South had the right to manage her own domestic institutions. At Marion, Indiana, in 1890, the Northern and Southern branches of the church were reunited, and once more the Christian Church became a national body. With churches in Canada, it really became international.

The acts of the local conferences and of the General Convention itself have never been considered binding upon Christian Churches, nor is the act of a local church considered binding upon an individual Christian, with the possible exception of his expulsion from membership for un-Christian conduct. The early conferences of the Christians were so frightened at the thought of ecclesiastical domination that they actually burned the records after they had been read at the concluding session, lest any one should use the decisions of such a conference to limit the freedom of action of any church or member or future conference.

One of the most regrettable incidents of this character occurred in connection with the death of Rev. James O'Kelly, founder of the Christian Church in the South. Upon his death, October 16, 1826, his widow (25) burned every vestige of his correspondence and other writings in manuscript form lest the Church should be bound by the ideas and decisions of its founder.

The Pattern of the Christian Church

The conviction underlying the movement which we have historically described in the preceding section, is of a piece with the underlying principles upon which the American Government is founded. The Pattern is of a democracy, of the people, by the people, and for the people as the great Lincoln described it. The Declaration of Independence declares that all just governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed. The Movement which has eventuated in the Christian Church would parallel this statement with some suih expression as, "All cooperative efforts or unions among Christians derive their just powers from the consent

(25) MacClenny, Op. cit.

of the members." The five principles which we have set forth as constituting the basis upon which the Christian Church was founded, taken in connection with their statement of purpose, sometimes regarded as a sixth principle, are clearly an effort to reproduce in the life of the church the pattern of the American democracy.

The new Movement had to have a name and so it selected for itself a name that was suggestive of the ultimate purpose which it conceived its goal to be. Accordingly the members were called Christians only, which they did not intend to be applied in a party sense, because they hoped that Christian union would speedily make it the general appellation of the whole body of believers. It will be recalled that Martin Luther preferred this appellation for the Reformation Movement rather than the title Protestant. The Christians recognized Christ, from whom they derived their name, as the Head of the church, just as they recognized the President of the United States as the Head of the American Government.

The legislative branch, if we may be pardoned for that expression, of the new movement was comprehended in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, which they accepted as sufficient rule of faith and practice. They did not intend that the Scriptures should bind the consciences of men and they provided against this in their fifth principle, which will be described below when we come to consider the judicial branch of their organized life.

The new movement defined the conditions of citizenship. "Christian character," they said, "or vital piety is a sufficient test of fellowship or of church membership." This may be called their executive branch, each individual citizen being regarded as a freeman and as under obligation to execute his life in accordance with the common law of the spiritual realm as God might give him to understand it.

The right of private judgment and the liberty of conscience was declared to be a right and privilege that should be accorded to and exercised by all. This principle which we may regard as the judicial branch of their organized life, made each individual the supreme judge, to determine the meanings of the fundamental law of the church for himself and the manner of its execution in personal living.

It was felt that, through the embracing of the five preceding principles, there could be erected among the followers of Christ a spritual union, paralleling and similar to the Federal union of the independent states that had just been welded into the new Republic of the Western Hemisphere. And so these prophetic leaders in the founding of the Christian Church committed themselves definitely and zealously to the creation of sentiment for Christian union.

Continued on page 38)

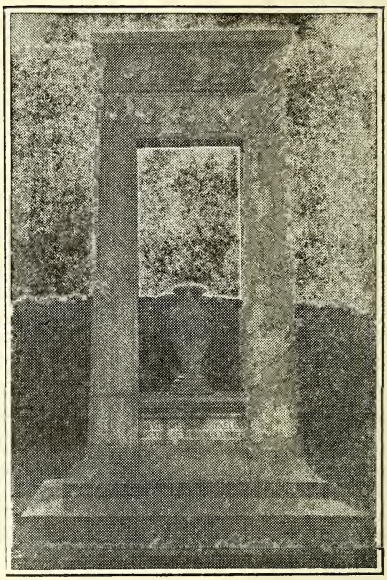
VIEWS OF THE MARKER

ON THE

ELON COLLEGE CAMPUS

IN MEMORY OF THE

REVEREND JAMES O'KELLY



LOOKING NORTH

LOOKING SOUTH

PROGRAM OF EXERCISES, OCTOBER 16, 1929

10:00 O'CLOCK A. M.

Whitley Memorial Auditorium

PRESIDENT W. A. HARPER, Presiding

Organ Prelude ..... David Brown Harrell

Processional Hymn 61—"O God, Our Help in Ages Past"

Invocation ..... Dr. E. L. Moffitt

Hymn 442—"The Church's One Foundation"

Scripture—I Kings 8:22-30, 54-60; Psalm 84

..... Rev. Alfred W. Hurst

Prayer ..... Dr. W. W. Staley

The Life of James O'Kelly ..... W. E. MacClenny

O'Kelly and Christian Union ..... Rev. Stanley C. Harrell

Anthem—"The Sanctus" ..... Gounod

THE COLLEGE CHOIR

Greetings from—

The Methodist Episcopal Church.....Pres. W. P. Few

The Methodist Protestant Church.....Rev. S. W. Taylor

The Southern Christian Convention.....Dr. L. E. Smith

Solo—"The Voice in the Wilderness".....Scott

MRS. GRACE HALL RIHELDAFFER

An Evaluation of James O'Kelly ..... Dr. J. O. Atkinson

Recessional Hymn 448—"Blest Be The Tie That Binds"

Unveiling ..... Little Miss Dorothy Ann Harward

ON THE CAMPUS

Doxology

Benediction ..... Dr. G. O. Lankford

James O'Kelly in the first volume of the Herald of Gospel of Liberty (26) discusses "A Plan of Union Proposed" under forty separate theses. When the Christians of the South came together after the Civil War to gather up the scattered fragments of their movement they rang true to the historical position of their church and adopted a resolution, "appealing to all true Christians of all denominations to promote the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace." This resolution also affirmed that, "conceiving the exercise of private judgment and liberty of conscience in matters of religion," to be the privilege and duty of all, the various denominations had enough in common to enable them to realize "Christian union without abridging liberty of conscience" (27).

The Christian Church and Doctrine (28)

The Christian Church in the South, as we have seen, was not interested in theology and arose over differences of opinion in respect to governmental and administrative matters, their desire being to make their church government in its organization and life according to the pattern of the democracy then beginning in America. We have also seen that in New England and the West, doctrinal matters did enter into the organization of the Christian Church. It always happens, however, whenever a new movement undertakes to legitimatize itself in the social milieu of its times, that it cannot escape the formulation of doctrines as expressions of its convictions and attitudes.

The Christian Church did not catalog its principles under the category of doctrines, but the historian of the Christian Movement must classify them there.

Six doctrines or contributions to the development of Christian doctrine in America are therefore properly to be accorded to that movement known as the Christian Church. These doctrines are as follows:

1. Jesus Christ is the only Head of the Church.

2. The name Christian is a sufficient designation for the followers of Christ.

3. The Bible is a sufficient rule of faith and practice.

4. Christian character is a sufficient test of fellowship or of church membership.

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(26) pp. 39 and 44.

(27) Morrill, Op. cit. p. 227.

(28) Bennett, S. A., THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH AND CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE, The Christian Publishing Asso'n., 1925. This is the best discussion of this topic to be had.

5. The liberty of conscience or the right of private judgment is the duty and privilege of each individual Christian.

6. Union of Christ's followers is the ultimate goal of the church, that the world might believe.

The leaders of the Christian Church have been prolific writers in the field of religion and particularly of Christian Journalism, but barely a handful of books during all their history have been written by these leaders to expound theology. One of the early attempts in this direction was a book by William Kinkade entitled "Bible Doctrine." His contemporaries understood this to be his own theology and though he has been called the theologian of the early Christian Church, his views have never exercised any influence of consequence over the church. The same is true of the theological writings of such leaders as N. Summerbell, J. F. Burnett, J. G. Bishop, Austin Craig, Carlyle Summerbell, W. S. Long and others.

It cannot be said too often that the Christian Church has not been interested in Christianity as a system of theology or as a body of doctrine, but that they have primarily been interested in it as a way of life which each individual follower of Christ is privileged, and, even more, under bounden duty, to interpret for himself as the Holy Spirit shall lead him.

The Christian Church and Christian Union (29)

We will now consider briefly the record of the Christian Church in its efforts to promote Christian union, not on a basis of doctrine, but on a basis of life.

1. With The Disciples of Christ

Thomas Campbell (30) came to America in 1807. His son, Alexander, arrived two years later. They began the "Reformers Movement" in 1809. In 1813 the Campbells, father and son, decided that immersion was the New Testament mode of baptism and so they were baptized by a Baptist minister. From that time till 1830 the movement of the Campbells was a Reformers Movement among the Baptists. In that year they were excluded by the Baptists and were forced to become a separate denomination. Since the name Christian had already been taken by another body with which they had been working side by side for many years, the Campbells named the

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(29) Morrill, M. T., Op. cit. pp. 927-316.

(30) Bennett, S. A., THE CHRISTIAN DENOMINATION AND CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE, The Christian Publishing Asso'n., Dayton, Ohio, 1925.

Gates, E., THE DISCIPLES OF CHRIST.

Moore, W. T., History of the Disciples of Christ, pp. 252-255.

Stone, B. W., Op. cit.

"Reformers or Restoration" Movement which they headed "The Disciples of Christ." The Movement led by the Campbells believed in Christian union also and it was natural that it and the older Christian Church should endeavor to come together. The two movements did locally come together on January 1st, 1832, at Lexington, Kentucky. Instead of there being a union of the two bodies in the technical sense of that term, however, what may be called a working agreement was arrived at by this action. Later Barton W. Stone withdrew from this "union" and returned to the fellowship of the Christian Church in which he died, having removed to the State of Illinois where he continued to be a leader in the Christian Movement, founding many Christian Churches in that state.

As a consequence of this "union" practically all the churches of the Christians in Kentucky, Indiana, Illinois, and Missouri, however, remained with the Disciples of Chrst. E. Gates, one of the most reliable historians of the Disciples Movement (31) says, that the Stone Movement brought to the Disciples of Christ an evangelistic zeal which they had not known before and that this, added to Alexander Campbell's methods as a teacher and as a proselyter, really accounts for the remarkable growth of that body. His exact words are: "These two elements, a proselytism and an evangelism, have survived side by side throughout the history of the Disciples and have contributed more than all other elements to their growth."

Dr. J. H. Garrison (32), one of the ablest leaders of the Disciples, speaks of the great gains that came to the Disciples Movement from this union with the Stone Movement. He says: "Much of the marvelous advance our plea has made in the states above named (Kentucky, Indiana, Illinois, and Missouri) and in the great West generally, is beyond doubt, largely owing to the union of the Christians with the Disciples."

This first adventure to reach a state of practical consummation in the field of Christian Union on the part of the Christian Church was, so to speak, born out of time. It proved disastrous for the Christian Movement in the states in which it had its Western origin and though its oldest conference of which we have any record, the Kentucky Conference, was organized in 1804, so powerful has been the influence of the Disciples of Christ in that state as a consequence of the "union," that it is one of the weakest conferences in the Christian denomination.

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(31) Op. cit. p. 203f.

(32) Garrison, J. H., THE REFORMATION OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY, p. 92f.

The Christians did not believe in immersion as the only proper mode of baptism nor in baptismal regeneration and their idea of union was not based on the desire for an exact conformity to primitive faith and practice, but upon the idea of uniting all men under Christ as predominant. Stone, in other words, looked to the diffusion of the spirit of love among Christians to be their uniting bond. Campbell on the other hand rested his hope of union upon an agreement as to New Testament faith and practice. By 1840 the so-called union had been dissipated. One of the greatest confusions, however, that has resulted from that original adventure is the fact that the Disciples of Christ in the West and South have continued to style themselves "Christians" and to call their denomination the "Christian Church" to the general dismay of the public respecting the two denominations.

2. With the Free Will Baptists

The Free Will Baptists arose contemporaneously with the Christians in New England and stood for almost the same things. As early as 1818 they were making overtures toward union with the Christians in Northern New England. In 1820 a joint conference was called at Covington, New York. An agreement was reached by which the united body should be called "The Church of God." They agreed to exchange pulpits and ministers and to labor in harmony, but nothing came of the conference. In 1823 Mark Fernald was sent as a messenger of the United States Christian General Conference to attend the Free Will Baptist annual meeting, to inquire if the Free Will Baptists would cooperate in ordinations, baptisms, and the communion. He did not receive an affirmative answer from the majority and the negotiations ceased.

In the South in 1859 the North Carolina and Virginia Conference appointed a committee to correspond with the Cape Fear Free Will Baptist Association about union, but nothing came of it.

In 1885 in the city of Boston, Massachusetts, a conference was held by the representatives of the two denominations with fifty-six preachers present. This gathering appointed a Committee of Eighteen which later met in New York and formulated what is known as the "New York Basis." The American Christian Convention in 1886 approved the work of the Committee of Eighteen and authorized a "continued effort to perfect the union of the two churches on the designated basis." But the Free Will Baptist State Convention of New York in 1886 refused to endorse the basis of union. However, the State Christian Association for New York endeavored to perfect a union in 1887 with theTrustees of the Free

Will Baptist Central Association. Out of this came what is known as the "Phoenix Basis" and the "Stanfordville Basis." But again the negotiations fell through. A similar meeting held for the New England States in the interest of union and closer fellowship, developed nothing worthy of note.

A local union, involving Free Will Baptists, Christians, Disciples, and the Church of God, arose in the city of Philadelphia in 1887, but this movement had no effect upon the general movement of any one of the cooperating bodies.

The Free Will Baptist Church of the North, however, united with the Northern Baptist Convention in 1911. But the Free Will Baptist Churches of the South did not join this union. In 1922-23, the Christian Churches of the South and the Free Will Baptist Churches of the South again undertook to approach each other as in 1859 with reference to organic union. The Christians were in favor of a plan that was drawn up by the Commissioners of the two bodies guaranteeing autonomy to each local church, but the Free Will Baptists repudiated the action of their leaders.

3. Other Efforts at Union

1. In 1884 the Unitarians made a definite proposal of union with the Christians when one of their ministers by the name of Arthur Fuller became a member of a Northern Illinois and Wisconsin Christian Conference. In 1848 the New Jersey Christian Conference voted against union with the Unitarians, though the Christian Church cooperated in the founding and the support of Meadville Theological Seminary (33). Likewise the Unitarians cooperated with the Christians in the support of Antioch College. In 1886 when action was taken to found a separate Theological School for the Christians, the working basis with the Unitarians was dissolved and there have been no further efforts at union between the two denominations, though they have continued to exchange fraternal courtesies ever since.

2. The denomination known as "Christian Union" succeeded in taking over practically all the churches of the Christians in the State of Missouri during the Civil War. The North Carolina and Virginia Conference in 1869 appointed four Commissioners to confer with the Christian Union brethren of the Western States. No results came of this Committee's work. In 1873 the Iowa State Christian Conference formed a union with the "Christian Union" brethren on

(33) Christie, F. A., THE MAKERS OF THE MEADVILLE THEOLOGICAL SCHOOL, 1844-1894, The Beacon Press, 1927.

the basis of the principles of the Christian Church. The title of this united organiztion was "State Association of Churches of Christ in Iowa." In 1890 when the General Convention of the Christians met at Marion, Indiana, it was reported that the union with the Christian Union was being more and more recognized. As a consequence of these efforts two or three Christian Union Churches and a few of their ministers actually united with the Christian Church, out of 140 churches and 200 ministrs reported. Again in 1909 in Missouri there was talk of union between the two bodies, but nothing has come of the matter.

3. The General Baptists of England sent greetings to the Christtians in 1823. Rev. J. A. Brinkworth of London came in 1876 and again in 1880 to bring the greetings of the General Baptists to the Christians and express their hope for Christian union, but nothing came of it.

4. There have been sporadic attempts to unite the Christians with the Presbyterians in 1835 and again in 1838, but nothing came of them. The Christians took part in the efforts for union in Michigan in 1874 and likewise they participated in the meeting of several denominations which met in Cincinnati the same year to consider organized Christian Unity. Few movements for union among the Christians raised greater expectation and resulted in more disappointment than the so-called "Four-Cornered Conference on Christian Union" by the representatives of the United Brethren, Congregational, Methodist Protestant, and Christian denominations held in Pittsburgh April 22,1903. After considerable discussion in this meeting a report was adopted by three denominations, but the Christian Churches could not agree to the affirmation of creeds which the report provided and so withdrew from the conference. Again in 1916-19, the Christians and Disciples of Christ began to discuss a basis of union. Several meetings were held and a statement of agreement was drawn up and published in the periodicals of both denominations. The essential recommendation of the agreement between the Commissioners of the two bodies was, that each church should be locally autonomous and that there should be a friendly interchange of membership. Nothing came of this. The Christians were represented in the "World Conference on Life and Work" held in Stockholm in 1925 and also in the "World Conference on Faith and Order" held at Lausanne in 1927. They have participated in every conference involving the question of Christian union held on the American Continent and in these two World Conferences.

5. The Christian Church has consistently advocated Christian union and has never lost its passion for the great cause. It has

consistently pleaded for it, in spite of the wail of its most distinguished historian who says (34):

"With the exception of an increment acquired from the Christian Union people, the union question, whenever it has been taken seriously, has resulted in numerical loss to the Christians. Other denominations have benefitted, the Christians sorrowed. And it should be said also that discussion of union never has conduced to harmony within the denomination, but has provoked discord. So long as the question is one of fellowshiping all Christians, of co-operating, of practicing unity, all goes well; but when merging churches and denominations is proposed, difficulty begins."

The Present Situation in the Christian Church With Reference to Christian Union

There has never been a session of the General Convention of the Christian Church which did not make definite pronouncement on the subject of Christian Union. In 1919 the General Convention met in Conneaut, Ohio, in postponed session, and in addition to adopting the customary resolution with reference to union, authorized the appointment of a Commission on Christian Union whose business it should be to undertake to interpret the historical posi- of the Christian Church on this vital subject to other denominations and to seek every opportunity to promote it.

This Commission produced a considerable body of literature which it issued in pamphlet form and offered much of it to other denominations for publication in their periodicals.

In 1922 the General Convention met in Burlington, North Carolina, and heard the report of this Commission. It thereupon authorized the Commission to make definite overtures to the several denominations asking them to consider with the Christians a basis of Christian union. One of these letters was very naturally directed to the Moderator of the National Council of the Congregational Churches who happened to be Dr. William E. Barton. He answered the letter and referred it to the proper Commission on Inter-Church Relations, and of which Dr. Frank K. Sanders is the Chairman and Dr. Charles E. Burton, the Secretary.

Through correspondence representatives of the two Commissions met in Toledo, Ohio, in the summer of 1926 and discussed a tentative basis of agreement. Several meetings have been held by the Commissions and this tentative basis was developed in final form for submission to the National Council of the Congregational

(34) Morrill, M. T., Op. cit. p. 316.

Churches, meeting in Detroit, Michigan, May-June, 1929 where it was approved without a dissenting vote. The essential feature of this plan is that both churches recognize Christianity as a way of life (35) and not a system of theology, a position which the Christian Church has consistently held from its inception, held by them when the Congregational Church was puritantically Calvinistic and felt the need of a statement of its beliefs. Happily the Congregational Church has, during its honorable career in liberalization and development, receded from both of these positions and has come to the point where it too recognizes our Christian faith as essentially a way of life. On this basis the union of the two churches is to be consummated, it is devoutly hoped and prayed.

The General Convention of the Christian Church has been called to meet in extra-ordinary session in the city of Piqua, Ohio, in October, 1929, where it will face the same plan of proposed union and where it is expected that a similar unanimous vote of approval will be given it.

If this vote of approval eventuates in October at the meeting of the Christian Churches, these two national bodies will be merged and an initial step will be taken toward the realization of the purpose for which the Christian denomination came into being, but that hope will not be fully achieved until every denomination in the whole world by whatever name it may be called, which is enlisted under the banner of Jesus Christ, shall have also added its strength to this union movement inaugurated by the merging of the Congregationalists and the Christians.

After this merger is consummated, as the Christian Church devoutly prays that it may be, the Christian denomination will LOSE itself in a united movement with the Congregationalists, but both of these denominations will FIND themselves more alive than ever in a continuous and united service for the cause of Christian union in the nation and the world. Nor can the passion of these united churches for Christian Union be discredited on the ground that a united Christendom would abridge the liberty of Christians, because union is being approached by them in terms of Christianity as a way of life and on the further basis of a free church in a civil state, our characteristic American doctrine. There will be unity in the

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(35) Betts, G. H., THE BELIEFS OF 700 MINISTERS AND THEIR MEANING FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION, Abingdon, 1929. Betts in this investigation discovers that there is not sufficient difference in the beliefs of the ministers of the Protestant denominations (with the possible exception of the Lutheran) to keep them apart further. All the denominations seem to be approaching the position that Christianity is a way of life which is the basis of the merger of the Congregational and Christian Churches.

midst of diversity, and all the followers of Jesus will be members one of another in mutual toleration, service and love crowned with the freedom with which Christ makes free.

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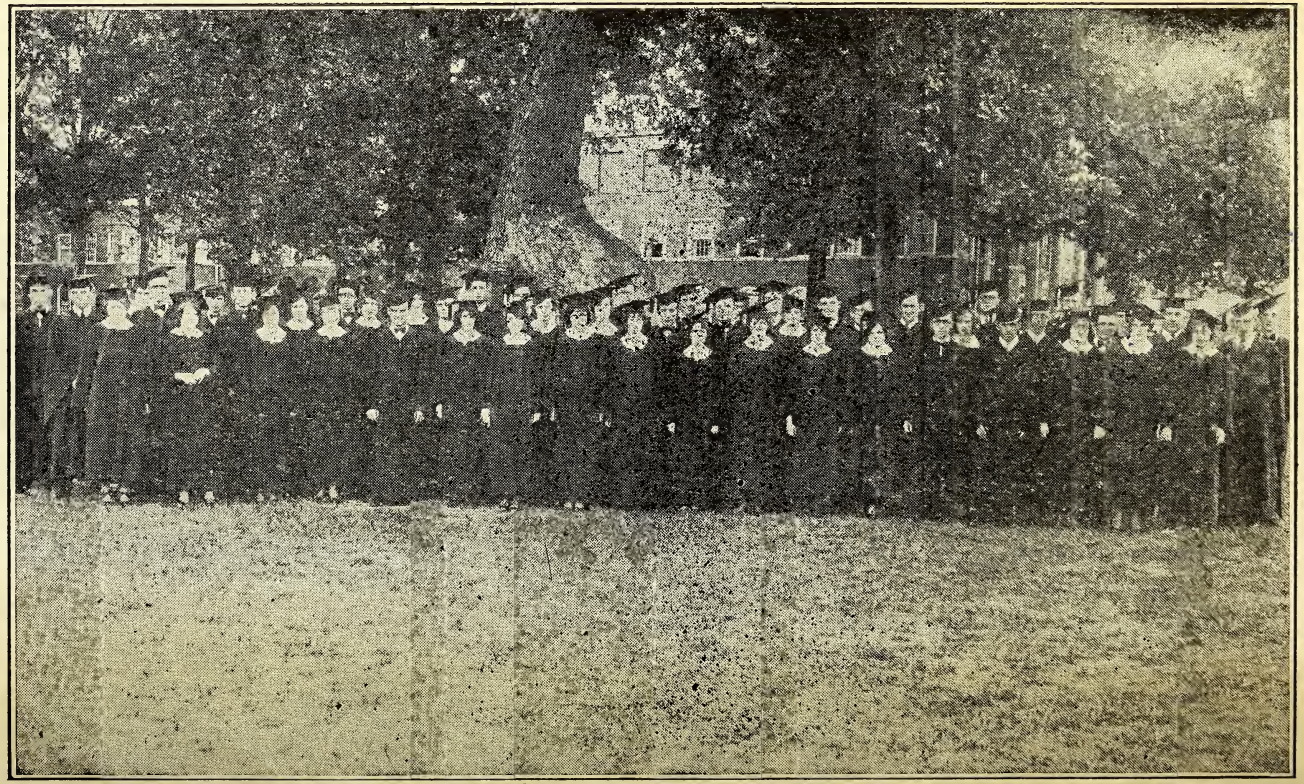

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